

Reds and Wobblies: working-class radicalism and the state in New Zealand 1915-1925



Talk presented at the National Library of New Zealand, 22 October 2013, by Jared Davidson about New Zealand's radical history. More images are available [here](#).

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That Edwards wrote of democracy in financial terms is both ironic and apt, considering that the protagonists of my talk tonight believed parliament was ruled by economic interests! So in keeping with this language, if democracy is to be judged on its use of surveillance, numerous records in the archives suggest that democracy in New Zealand has often been in the red. In fact, 'seeing red' has been a constant factor through New Zealand's history, especially in times of social and industrial unrest. Working-class radicals who promoted an alternative to capitalism were particularly targeted by those in power. Arguably, those who were most targeted in the early part of the twentieth century were members of the Industrial Workers of the World (known as Wobblies).

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My talk tonight hopes to look at some of this working class radicalism, and the reaction to it by the state. Much of this activity was centred on the distribution of radical literature—‘mental dynamite’ in the form of penny pamphlets, newspapers, and other ephemera. Ports and postboxes became the battleground for an intense cultural struggle—a struggle that questioned the war, the nature of work, and authority itself. This battle for minds had material results. Intense state surveillance and a raft of legislation not only determined who could read what, but who would be considered a legitimate resident of the so-called ‘workers paradise’

that was New Zealand.

Wobblies 101

The Industrial Workers of the World was founded in the United States in 1905, by a conglomerate of socialists, Marxists and anarchists. Its founders were disenchanted by the craft nature of the American Federation of Labour and its exclusive membership criteria.

Instead, the IWW sought to organise all workers, especially the so-called ‘unskilled’

neglected by the AFL. As well as being open to workers of any gender or colour, the IWW

promoted the ‘One Big Union,’ a fighting union that—through the solidarity of workers organized along class lines instead of trade, and the tactical use of the strike weapon—would abolish the wage system.

Its widely quoted preamble (1908) stated:

Quote:

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, and abolish the wage system"

Although the IWW initially promoted both industrial and political action, it split in 1908 over the rejection parliamentary politics. For the Chicago IWW, the political arena was controlled by capital and therefore the place to make change in society was the workplace. As one New Zealand wobbly argued, "Parliament is a mirror reflecting conditions outside. When your face is dirty, do you wash the mirror?"

The IWW advocated building a new world in the shell of the old, which meant how the union and its struggles was conducted were just as important as the outcome. As a result, direct democracy and the curbing of power in the hands of a few was core to the organisation. "The IWW considered a reliance on leadership as fostering dependence amongst the working class," notes Stuart Moriarty-Patten, whose forthcoming book on the IWW in New Zealand is being published by Rebel Press. New Zealand Wobblies decried the local labour movement as "cursed and hampered by leaders." Instead, "active, intelligent workers [should] determine to do their own thinking... to fight on all occasions for complete control by the rank and file and against sheep-like following of leaders."

As a result the IWW was much more than a simple union movement. As well as fighting for better conditions and shorter hours, the IWW fostered education, internationalism, and a radical working class counter-culture through the influential use of song and graphics.

Although not without its faults, the appeal of the IWW made it social and cultural movement on an international scale.

The IWW in New Zealand

New Zealand's first IWW local was formed in Wellington in December 1907, and other locals were formed in Christchurch and Auckland – both of which

received official charters from the IWW headquarters in Chicago. Informal groups sprung up in industrial towns such as Huntly, Waihi, and Denniston, and the cultural norms and tactics championed by the Wobblies—such as the general strike, sabotage, and the go-slow—soon spiced the local discourse. The rally-cry of ‘a fair day’s wage’ was dropped for ‘abolish the wage system;’

‘fellow-worker’ replaced ‘comrade’; and for a period, the New Zealand Federation Of Labor adopted the IWW’s revolutionary preamble.

Pamphlets and newspapers of the IWW had a wide circulation in New Zealand. According to the Secretary of the Waihi branch of the Socialist Party, imported IWW anti-militarist pamphlets were “finding a ready sale” in 1911. *Chunks of IWWism* and *Industrial Unionism*, two locally produced pamphlets, sold in quantities of 3,000 and 1,000 copies each, while the *Industrial Unionist*, newspaper of the New Zealand IWW, reached a circulation of 4,000.

These figures do not indicate their true readership however, as workers shared their copies or would read the columns out loud in groups.

As Mark Derby has pointed out, the distribution of cheap printed propaganda was vital to the spread of IWW ideas and tactics. “New Zealand Wobblies relied on the impact of IWW

literature such as the Little Red Songbook,” moving from town to town “sowing the seed of rebellion.” This constant agitation bore fruit, and the IWW played a visible part in the strikes that formed the upsurge of militant labour before the First World War.

Wartime activity

However, on the outbreak of war in August 1914, the IWW was fragmented and weakened by the defeat of the 1913 Great Strike. Many of their leading members had fled New Zealand to escape prosecution, but there were still IWW locals in Auckland, Wellington, Denniston and Christchurch. Wobblies continued to soapbox on street corners across the country and were active in the workplace, especially on the waterfront.

Yet times were tough for those openly against militarism and capitalism. The IWW found itself up against a wartime government itching to prove its loyalty to the British Empire. The National Coalition of William Massey and Joseph Ward

took measures to clamp down on any non-conformist activity it deemed seditious, using the pretence of war conditions to muzzle dissent—whether it was opposition to conscription (in the form of the 1916 Military Service Act), or highlighting economic conditions at home. Numerous War Regulations empowered the executive branch of the Coalition government to regulate without reference to Parliament.

Richard Hill notes that these regulations, initially used for military purposes, “gradually increased in severity and in political rather than military significance.” For example, war regulations were soon unleashed on socialist speakers and strikes in industries deemed essential to the war effort. Rather tellingly, those convicted of publishing information deemed valuable to the enemy were fined a maximum of £10, while anyone who publicly criticised

the actions of the New Zealand government was fined £100 or received twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Not surprisingly, Wobblies were targeted due to their advocacy of direct action in the workplace, the fostering of an oppositional working class counter-culture, and their radical critique of militarism. New Zealand’s Crown Prosecutor “repeatedly stressed the distinction between sincere objectors... and ‘parasites’, ‘anarchists’, and other IWW types.” As a result, a number of Wobblies were arrested and given maximum jail time during the war.

Wobblies had been scapegoats for all kinds of scrupulous activity before 1914, but in wartime the press found new ways to discredit the IWW. Hysterical headlines were quick to dub Wobblies as ‘Hirelings of the Huns’ or ‘German-born children of the devil,” and any union radicalism was tarred with the IWW brush.

In one bizarre article, ‘The Critic’ responded to an auctioneer’s listing of ‘famous IWW hens’

in the *Manawatu Evening Standard* with: “‘IWW hens?’ If these belong to the order of ‘I Wont Work’ they will probably get it where the Square Deal would like to give it to their human prototypes—in the neck!” When the shipping vessel Port Kembla struck a German mine off the coast of Farewell Spit in 1917, one writer in the *Ashburton Guardian* put it down to pro-German sabotage, stating: “this Dominion is not by any means free of the noxious IWW element...

this type of human being should be put out of existence on the first evidence of abnormality.”

Censorship of IWW propaganda

Ironically, scaremongering by the press publicised IWW methods such as the go slow far more than Wobblies could ever have done on their own. The go-slow used by watersiders, miners, drivers, and tramway was a major concern to employers and government, and abhorred as a significant threat to the established economic order. “It is the most serious problem that we face at the present time” wrote Defence Minister James Allen to Massey in January 1917. “[Alexander] Herdman has been taking evidence on behalf of the Police about going-slow... as far as Defence is concerned, if any man is proved to be going slow’ [before a military Service Board] we shall cancel his exemption... we cannot possibly allow this fatal practice to get hold in New Zealand or else the nation is doomed.” Not only did these tactics threaten war profits or the government’s lucrative trading deals with Britain; the go slow questioned the work ethic central to the wage system itself. As a result, the War Regulations of 16 February 1917 included going slow in the category of seditious strikes.

Authorities were also dismayed at the volume of IWW ephemera still finding its way around the country. Bearing such lines as “Fast workers die young” or “Go Slow! Do Not Waste your Life,” IWW stickers peeked out from walls and lampposts across New Zealand. In a cheeky swipe at conscription, one sticker was stuck in the middle of a National Registration poster. As late as 1927, Wellington customs found 125 of these stickers in the baggage of a SS Maheno seaman named Evans.

Another ‘silent agitator’ that caused uproar was a satirical poster by ex-New Zealand Wobbly Tom Barker. ‘To Arms!’ called on “Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians, Landlords, Newspaper Editors and other Stay-At-Home Patriots” to replace the workers in the trenches. Four copies were “smuggled across the Tasman... and pasted up outside the Supreme Court in

Wellington,” causing the judge to suspend the court until the offending posters were removed.

Anti-war pamphlets were also making their rounds. “War and the Workers” was a pocket-sized booklet printed by the Auckland IWW that implored workers not

to become “hired murderers.” Sold from their Swanson Street office, the booklet insisted, “Those who own the country [should] do the fighting! Let the workers remain home and enjoy what they produce.” After being distributed at the Buckle Street Drill Hall in Wellington, the booklet was forwarded to Solicitor-General John Salmond. Salmond urged for war regulations to be extended so that immediate powers would be available to punish those responsible for such

“mischievous publications.”

MP John Hornsby also raised concerns about IWW ephemera in Parliament, decrying the

“circulation in this country of pamphlets of a particularly obnoxious and deplorable nature, emanating from an organization known as the Independent World’s Workers [sic]—

commonly referred to as the IWW.” Hornsby asked whether immediate steps would be taken

“to prevent the circulation through the post of the harmful publications in connection with the propaganda of this anarchial [sic] society—a society which openly preached sabotage, which meant in plain English, assassination and destruction of property?” The resulting Order in Council of 20 September 1915 specifically prohibited “the importation into New Zealand of the newspapers called *Direct Action* and *Solidarity*, and all other printed matter published by or on behalf of the society known as ‘The Industrial Workers of the World.’”

Direct Action was a lively newspaper published by the Australian IWW that found its way to New Zealand via seamen crossing the Tasman, or by mail. Two months after the Order of Council was in place, the Post and Telegraph Department reported the withholding of “14

single copies [of] *Direct Action*; 2 bundles [of] *Direct Action*,” as well as “6 bundles [of]

Solidarity.” A number of these copies were then used by Police to chase up New Zealand subscribers listed in its columns. In December 1915 detectives in Auckland, Napier and Wellington hunted for a subscriber listed as Erickson. At first they thought he was a Wellington socialist named Frederickson, but soon concluded he was in fact Carl Erickson, a casual labourer and friend of

Wellington anarchist Philip Josephs (who was also a *Direct Action* subscriber). The Police report noted that both men had donated to the Barker Defence Fund, set up after Tom Barker was convicted for publishing an anti-war cartoon in *Direct Action*.

The military also used a 1915 edition of *Direct Action* to investigate the Workers' University Direct Action Group, a 'workers university' that had been set up by Auckland Wobblies.

According to *Direct Action*, lessons dealt with "economics, biology, physiology, Social Democrat fallacies, State Ownership ie State Capitalism fakes, Law and Authority Bluff, the anarchist doctrines of 'Total Abstention'" and "scientific sabotage, the most potent weapon of the intelligent militant minority." They also had IWW literature on hand for the 'worker students'. After their Queen Street landlord forced the workers' university to disband, its members were lucky to escape imprisonment (if they did at all).

One radical who was not let off the hook was prominent 1913 striker Charles Johnson. When Johnson was arrested in 1917 and found to have "an enormous amount of IWW literature" in his possession, including three copies of *Direct Action*, the Chief Detective said "with the greatest confidence" that "this man is a danger to the community." Johnson asked to be let off

with a fine; the magistrate replied, "Oh, I can't let you off with a fine in these conditions." He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Censorship of correspondence

As well as the suppression of IWW publications, war regulations also made it illegal to

"incite, encourage, advice or advocate violence, lawlessness and disorder, or express any seditious intention." What exactly constituted a "seditious intention" was interpreted broadly by the state, and included the contents of private correspondence.

Both Customs and the Post and Telegraph Department had a number of censors working within their ranks, the latter including the Deputy Chief Censor, William Tanner. But it was the military that managed censorship during the War. Tanner and other censors located across the country answered directly to Colonel

Charles Gibbon, who was both Chief Censor and Chief of the General Staff of the New Zealand Military Forces. Postal censors were mostly officers of the Post Office and worked in the same building “as a matter of convenience”, but censors acted “under the instructions of the Military censor. As a result, the Defence Department’s earlier interest in the monitoring of agitators carried over to agitation of the handwritten kind.

“During the course of the late war,” wrote Tanner:

Quote:

it was considered necessary to examine secretly the correspondence of certain persons who were supposed to be disaffected, and who were working to defeat the efforts of the New Zealand Government in meeting its obligations regarding the war by advocating [the] ‘go slow’ or inciting to resist the Military Service Act.

Instructed to “suppress whatever was of a seditious or treasonable nature,” Tanner believed his work “gave the Police the necessary opening... to break up the organizations whilst still in the act of formation.”

One of those under Tanner’s watchful gaze was the Wellington anarchist Philip Josephs.

After letters to US anarchist Emma Goldman were spotted in October 1915, Josephs was arrested and “detained all day in the ‘cooler’ until 4 o’clock in the afternoon,” when he was released without being charged. While Josephs was in police custody, two detectives searched his shop in Cuba Street and took possession of all books and papers on anarchism found on the premises. They then repeated their search at his Khandallah home.

As well as holding a considerable stash of anarchist literature, it appears Josephs’ shop had been the Wellington Local of the IWW. Police found “a number of unused official membership books, rubber stamps, and other gear used in connection with that constitution,”

as well as IWW correspondence, pamphlets and papers.

One such correspondent was the Christchurch Wobbly, Syd Kingsford. Two Police reports show that he was put under surveillance, while the chief military

censor, Colonel Gibbon, made sure his correspondence was also censored.

Another was J Sweeny, a Blenheim-based labourer who was writing to Josephs to order anarchist newspapers. In a letter that never reached its destination, Sweeny asked Josephs to

“remember me to the Direct Action Rebels in Wellington,” indicating there were still

Wobblies active in the capital at that time. With typical Wobbly flair, Sweeney signed his letter: “Yours for Direct Action. No Political Dope.”

Other censored letters written by an Auckland Wobbly, William Bell, give a sense of the level of surveillance put in place by the state. “The Johns and military pimps are on the look out for the correspondence of men known in our movement,” wrote Bell, who was trying to secure a dummy address “for the purposes of ordering leaflets without an imprint for secret distribution at this end of New Zealand.” Also mentioned in Bell’s letter was “a private meeting of picked trusted militants” due to take place at his bach, confirming that Auckland Wobblies were still active in mid-1917, albeit discreetly. Obviously Bell was not discreet enough. He was arrested and sentenced to eleven months imprisonment.

(During his hearing, Bell provoked laughter in the courtroom. When the magistrate, referring to a comment in Bell’s letter, asked him what a ‘snide-sneak’ was, Bell replied: “A man who plays both ways. We have plenty in the Labor movement, unfortunately”).

Seditious soapboxing

The war regulations used against those in possession of seditious correspondence also targeted the spoken word. ‘Rabid Orator’ and past Committee member of the Wellington IWW, Joseph Herbert Jones, was imprisoned for sedition in January 1917 after soapboxing to 500 people in Dixon Street, Wellington. “I want the working class to say to the masters,” said Jones, “we don’t want war. We won’t go to the war.” During his court appearance Jones read a long and ‘inflammatory’ poem that received applause from onlookers in the court. The judge was not impressed, nor did he share Jones’ view that all he had done was defend the interests of his fellow-workers. He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Another radical to be jailed for 12 months was William Parker, a watersider who told a Wellington crowd in 1917 that the only way to stop conscription was with a general strike. In 1919 Parker was in court again, having distributed locally produced flyers promoting the go slow, the lockout of the oppressors, and building a new society in the shell of the old. After amusing the large crowd of watersiders in the back of the court by “verbally annihilating His Worship”, Parker was sentenced to 12 months for ‘IWWism’ (sedition).

For a few in power, the jailing of Wobblies was not enough. In 1917 MP Vernon Reed asked in Parliament whether Prime Minister Massey had considered the provisions of the Unlawful Associations Amendment Bill introduced in Australia, “aiming at the destruction of the IWW

and kindred institutions, and providing for the deportation of undesirables; and whether he will introduce into Parliament a measure having similar objects?” In reply, Massey stated that such a law was under consideration. The eventual result was the 1919 Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Act, of which more below.

Wobblies not already in jail were kept under close surveillance during the later years of the war. In October 1918 the Defence Department had their eyes on Nita aka Lila Freeman, a female wobbly active in Wellington. Correspondence of “an anti-conscriptionist and seditious nature” between Nita and a fellow wobbly named ‘Don’ was discovered by the military censor, which sparked further surveillance. ‘Don’ had been giving classes on political economy and socialism in Blackball, and it was hoped ascertaining their identities would lead

to arrests: “in all probability the woman will be arrested on some charge at an early date,”

noted the file.

Although it appears Nita Freeman was never arrested, by the war’s end 287 people had been charged with sedition or disloyalty—208 were convicted and 71 sent to prison. That many Wobblies were among those arrested is hardly surprising, considering their radical opposition to militarism and direct action tactics.

Post-war surveillance

Despite the cease of hostilities in Europe, surveillance of the IWW did not end

with the First World War. Industrial unrest and social revolution immediately after the war's end was a deeply entrenched concern for the New Zealand Government. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, coupled with unrest around the globe in 1918-1919, was seen as potential source of increased revolutionary activity in New Zealand. Bolshevism would now compete with the IWW for the state's attention, and for the title of New Zealand's favourite scapegoat.

As well as international upheavals such as mutinous soldiers, police strikes and the downfall of various regimes, the cost of living and dissatisfied returned servicemen were also seen as catalysts to major unrest. The government passed a range of anti-firearms laws, and watched closely the rhetoric of political parties like the New Zealand Labour Party and the Communist Party of New Zealand.

The state also kept tabs on the second wave of syndicalist organizations, such as the Alliance of Labour and the One Big Union Council. Formed in 1919 to promote class solidarity between watersiders, seamen, miners and railway workers, the Alliance of Labour was decried by the Reform government as nothing less than the IWW in disguise. Indeed, their promotion of direct action and rejection of parliamentary politics saw them align with the IWW, causing the Employers Federation to lament the "lawless tendency on the part of Extreme labour." In the end however, the Alliance failed to live up to its revolutionary rhetoric.

In Auckland, Wobblies like Bill Murdoch, George Phillips and Leo Woods helped to form the One Big Union Council. Leo Woods had sat on the Thames strike committee during the 1913 Great Strike, and in 1917 was thrown into what he called "one of Massey's concentration camps, Kiangaroa Prison Camp," for 18 months. After his release, Woods became the literary secretary of the One Big Union Council and was delegated to smuggle banned literature from Sydney. He would go on to co-found the Communist Party in 1921.

The secretary of the Council was former wartime-secretary of the Auckland IWW, George Phillips, who, like Woods, had been jailed for refusing to be conscripted.

For those in power monitoring these developments, the possibility of a general strike seemed imminent. Recorded industrial disputes had risen from 8 in 1915 to 75 in 1921. As a result, Prime Minister Massey urged his party faithful to "secure good men to stem the tide of Anarchy and Bolshevism." This radical

tide, complained Massey, “is worse than folly... the matter must be taken in hand and stopped.”

Massey’s red baiting had significant support from a number of high profile allies. The Protestant Political Association, led by the vehement Reverend Howard Elliot, vowed to oppose “Bolshevism and ‘IWWism’ in every shape and form.” Also active was the New

Zealand Welfare League, formed in July 1919 for the express purpose of curbing the activities of revolutionary labour, IWW doctrines, and Bolshevism. The League’s active press campaign featured newspaper articles on the IWW and their “criminal” attitudes towards work, property rights, and state authority.

The red scare whipped up by conservative interests allowed the state to extend its wartime grip into peacetime. Tanner was kept on as censor in July 1919 by Defence Minister Allen, who wrote to Massey that, “a good deal of valuable information comes to the government through the medium of the censor, and it was thought wise not to lose this information.” The war regulations that created Tanner’s job were also extended under the War Regulations Continuance Act of 1920 (which was not repealed until 1947).

Other forms of surveillance continued apace. In his history of the New Zealand Police Force, Graham Dunstall notes that in January 1919, Police Commissioner John O’Donovan sent a confidential memo to officers across New Zealand:

Quote:

“In the view that considerable industrial and other unrest is reported from other countries and may extend to this Dominion it is necessary that special precautions be taken to keep in touch with the movements and actions of persons of revolutionary tendencies who are already here, or who may arrive”

Meetings of radicals continued to be attended by police and fortnightly reports were sent to Police Headquarters. Detectives in each district systemised this work by compiling an index of individuals who had “extreme revolutionary socialistic or IWW ideas.”

One Wobbly to be caught in this post-war net was Henry Murphy, an Australian labourer based in Auckland. In April 1919 Murphy wrote to a fellow worker in Australia that military deserters were being picked up every day; detectives “run

the rule” over passengers arriving by ship; and that two Wobblies, “Nugget and Scrotty,” had been “turned back”. The letter was intercepted by a censor and handed to police. “Murphy appears to be a dangerous character of the IWW type,” noted the censor. “He is an admirer of the Bolsheviks and is gradually drifting towards anarchy, revolution and outrage... his hatred of work is one of the traits of the IWW character.” Murphy was hauled before the court for failing to register as a reservist under the Military Service Act, where he declared, “anti-militarists have done more for democracy than all the soldiers who went to Europe.” He was sentenced to 14 days hard labour and was due to be deported under the war regulations, but instead he agreed to leave New Zealand voluntarily.

Deporting ‘undesirables’

Murphy’s ‘voluntary’ deportation foreshadowed a law change designed to further extend the state’s reach over radicalism. In November of that year, the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act was passed into law. This Act gave the Attorney-General power to single-handedly deport anyone whom he deemed "disaffected or disloyal, or of such a character that his presence would be injurious to the peace, order, and good Government" of New Zealand. He could also prevent anyone landing in the country, which meant Customs and Police further cemented their wartime responsibilities of monitoring the harbours.

However the Defence Department was kept in the loop by having copies of every alien identity certificate sent to them. The military would then match these certificates up to their own black list of “revolutionary agents and undesirables.”

According to Massey, the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act would be used against those who “favour Bolshevism and IWWism.” It was soon put to good effect. Two Wobblies named Nolan and McIntyre were prevented from landing in New Zealand and promptly sent on their way to Sydney – their fares paid by the government. But one Wobbly who wouldn’t go quietly was the Australian seaman and returned serviceman, Noel Lyons.

In May 1925 seamen on board the SS Manuka refused to leave Wellington until their food was improved. However as the Union Steamship Company made clear to reporters, the real issue was “the deliberate attempt to institute job control” via the go slow. Using the pretext of IWW literature and posters found on board the ship, Lyons was read the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act and given 28

days to leave New Zealand. Instead, Lyons and the crew walked off their Sydney-bound vessel singing 'Solidarity Forever,' and convened a meeting at the Communist Hall.

300 people packed into the Manners Street Hall to hear Lyons speak about the 'ham and egg'

strike. "I have been described as a paid agitator," argued Lyons, "but it is a well known fact that all who take an active part in attempting to better the condition of the worker... develop whiskers overnight, and appear as a Bolshevik." Despite resolutions of protest from numerous unions, Lyons was imprisoned for two weeks before being shipped to Australia.

On his arrival Lyons made the most of what the *NZ Truth* called 'the new spasm of [the]

IWW," organising mass meetings and reviving the Sydney IWW.

The deportation of Lyons highlights how the authorities would pick and choose when someone was to be considered a New Zealander, a British subject, or foreign immigrant. The Reform government's loyalty to Empire and their making of the world 'safe for democracy'

did not seem to contradict the deportation of British subjects. "New Zealand is more conservative than England," noted Lyons on his arrival in Sydney. "They regarded me as a foreigner... It is too funny for words. When I was on my way to France as an Australian soldier, they did not say I was an undesirable... But now, when I put up a bit of a fight for humanity, they turn me out of the country."

Conclusion

Noel Lyons was not the only radical to be deported in the post-war years, nor was he the first.

But his case is indicative of the systematic surveillance put in place after the First World War, and the attitude of the New Zealand government towards the IWW. Although this treatment pales in comparison to the violence and mass deportations inflicted on the American IWW, the National Coalition and Reform governments clearly felt threatened.

Class struggle and revolution from below; the flouting of law; the go-slow and the disregard shown to the work ethic; such tactics called into question the social relationships needed for capitalism and the state to function. As a result, the Defence, Police, and Customs Departments, as well as scores of legislation, was used to ensure the IWW never regained its pre-war strength.

Obviously the IWW formed but a tiny part of the working-class radicalism of the day, and the IWW label was thrown about rather hysterically. This makes the identification of Wobblies

during the war even harder. However the actions of the IWW during 1915-1925, and the reaction to them by the state, indicates a discernible legacy of IWW radicalism in New Zealand—one that reached well beyond the Great Strike of 1913. While it is hard to measure their precise influence on the local labour movement, I hope the examples above help to question what Kerry Taylor has called the “premature obituary” of the IWW and revolutionary syndicalism in New Zealand.

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